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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001398

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA

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TAGS: PGOV SOCI SENV EAGR PREL NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIAN MILITARY COMBING FOR EXTREMISTS, BOKO
HARAM DEPUTY ARRESTED

REF: ABUJA 1392

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Anthony R. Eterno for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) SUMMARY: Fighting between security forces and suspected Boko Haram extremists has subsided, although one local press report states as many as 43 extremists were killed July 30 in a gun battle in Yobe. Boko Haram's top leader remains at large, but much of the group's senior leadership is reportedly in custody or on the run. There are reports of widespread and perhaps indiscriminate arrests of suspected extremists, as well as excessive use of force in some areas, though reports that the military used artillery in July 28 fighting cannot be confirmed. Indications are that the situation is calming down, but we are not out of the woods yet; among other remaining challenges is the fate of as many as 4,000 displaced persons. END SUMMARY.

MILITARY AND POLICE CAMPAIGNS WINDING DOWN

12. (C) According to U.S. Mission contacts, other reporting channels, and local news reporting, Nigerian military and police forces are in the final stages of rooting out Boko Haram members across northern Nigeria. There were no reports of new attacks on July 30, except for an unconfirmed local press report that as many as 43 persons were killed in a gun battle between security forces and suspected militants on the outskirts of Potiskum, Yobe's second largest city. Borno state Chief of Protocol Ahmad Sanda told Emboffs that the state's security chief assured him that the attacks are over.

In addition, Borno state Permanent Secretary for the Department of Political and Cabinet Affairs Hayatudeen Baba Omar told us that the major concern is not further attacks, but how the state is going to deal with a small number of civilians who have fled to Borno from other states out of fear.

13. (C) On July 29, Borno Governor Ali Modu Sheriff told the Ambassador that an intense effort is underway to "prevent Mohammed Yusuf from leaving the state." Asked why he thought people follow Yusuf, Sheriff replied that "Yusuf is playing on the intelligence, poverty levels, and vulnerability of the youth. No religion teaches what he is saying and doing; no religion calls for the destruction of a nation or of a

society; and no religion condemns youth education, particularly Islam." Ambassador expressed concern with civilian safety to which Sheriff responded that he is "working hard to ensure civilian protection -- letting people know as much as possible to remove themselves from certain areas." Sheriff stated that as, far as he knew, there have been no civilian casualties. According to Sheriff, Yusuf's children ironically are attending a Lebanese-Nigerian school with western curricula.

BIG ARRESTS IN BORNO, SOKOTO, KANO, AND GOMBE

¶4. (C) Borno State Police Command Public Relations Officer Malam Isa Azare told reporters that police and other security agencies arrested the deputy leader of Boko Haram, Bukar Shikwa, in Maiduguri on July 29 after a state-wide manhunt. In addition to Shikwa's arrest, Sokoto state police also arrested a former university lecturer, Kadiru Atiku, who is suspected of being Boko Haram's local leader, as well as five other extremists. Meanwhile, Kano State Urban Planning and Development Managing Director Hassan Na-Abba told reporters that his agency, with the help of heavily armed policemen, was ordered "to bulldoze the residence and mosque of Boko Haram's Kano local leader, Salisu Al Amin." Seven other suspected Boko Haram members were arrested in Gombe State on July 29, according to Police Commissioner Ibi, but warned that it was still premature to label them as extremists until the investigation has concluded. Gombe State Police Commissioner Joseph Ahmed Ibi informed reporters that 3,000

ABUJA 00001398 002 OF 002

policemen are on duty surveilling the state with patrols and checkpoints.

CIVILIAN TOLL

¶5. (C) Four days of Boko Haram attacks have taken their toll on civilians. People living near the epicenter of the fighting have fled to other areas. Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) estimates the number of displaced persons at 4,0000, but other estimates go as low as 1,000. Two students in Maiduguri told Emboffs that they were forced to relocate to another part of town and that many families have run short of food supplies. Other reports indicate that corpses still lie in the streets and on the floor of a public hospital, raising fears of a cholera outbreak.

¶6. (C) The security services have reportedly made widespread arrests of suspected extremists, many based on little or no evidence. Local Nigeria Human Rights Commission and International Red Cross staff are constrained in reporting because telephone communications have been effectively shut down since Sunday night, although at least some cybercafes remain up and running. A Sufi activist in Maiduguri complained to Emboffs of excessive use of force by security agents who alleged shot motorists and pedestrians & just because they have a beard." "As a result," he said, "residents are shaving their beards and changing the style of their dress to avoid being targeted."

¶7. (C) COMMENT: While Boko Haram's top leader remains at large, much of the group's senior leadership appears to be captured or on the run. If the operational phase of the security campaign is winding down, the national focus will shift to how the security services performed and how displaced and detained persons are being treated. Nigerian officials stress the anti-extremist operation, sparked by a coordinated assault on government buildings in four states, was led by police, but it is clear that the military played a major, perhaps decisive, role in the operations. We will continue to monitor the situation closely, and to urge

Nigerian officials of the importance of delivering on the promised GON commission of inquiry into the attacks. We are also stressing that displaced persons and detainees should be treated in a manner consistent with both Nigerian and international legal norms. END COMMENT.

**¶8. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS**